

## INTERNATIONAL ALBERTANS



COURTESY CHARLIE RUSSELL

### Being Nice to Bears

#### Albertans bring a new approach to bear management in Russia

The massive grizzly extends its paw, curling its long and potentially deadly claws into the palm of a gentle human hand. It's a moment of trust—and a moment of extraordinary communication between a man and a wild brown bear. It is also proof that bears and people can live together without fear, says Alberta naturalist Charlie Russell, who is studying grizzly bears in a remote wilderness on eastern Russia's Kamchatka peninsula. Russell and his partner, artist Maureen Enns, are the first foreigners to study Russia's grizzly bears.

The couple, who live in the foothills west of Calgary, are in their sixth year of studying the bears, determined to prove that most people have it all wrong when it comes to managing the wild animals. National park officials in Canada believe a safe bear is one that learns to fear people, but Russell disagrees. "A fearful bear is a dangerous animal," he says. "And aggression in people will make a bear aggressive." Russell and Enns intend to continue their Russian study for at least another three years and hope eventually to change management policies concerning bear and human conflicts. Our wilderness is shrinking, so

people must learn how to live in close proximity to bears if the animals are to survive.

Because of his work, Russell is convinced that bears are not dangerous if treated with kindness and kept away from such temptations as [human] food. By understanding bear behaviour, he is able to walk with the Russian grizzlies, hold their paws and reach inside their mouths. He and Enns have stood next to mother bears with cubs, massive males and bears with food—situations where one would expect a bear to become aggressive. Yet the couple has never been charged or attacked, and the bear spray they carry has never been used. Keeping the bears away from their food, cabin and

float plane has been easy. They've simply strung a barrier of solar-powered electric fencing. One jolt and the bears learned to respect the fence.

Their accomplishments have won accolades from the Russians, who are changing their attitudes toward the wild animals. Until now, the South Kamchatka sanctuary was a haven for poachers, with hundreds of bears shot for their gall bladders, which are used in Asian medicine. Now, thanks to Russell and Enns, the sanctuary protects the bears. The couple has hired five rangers and two police officers to patrol the area, the first time the park has received such protection since it was established in 1984. Once troubled by bears roaming through garbage and gardens, the fishing village of Kurilskoye is also now protected by electric fencing. The couple is also paying for a guide to be trained at an outfitter school in Kamloops, B.C., in the hope that eco-tourism may one day be introduced to the Kamchatka region. Such conservation initiatives are part of the study's US\$140,000 annual budget, supported by the Raincoast Conservation Society in B.C., Montana's Craighead Environmental Research Institute and by donations.

Russell and Enns began their groundbreaking work in Russia in 1996. Russell had long worked with wild bears in North America, having studied the white Kermode bears on British Columbia's Princess Royal Island and established

the Khutzeymateen Valley in B.C. as Canada's first grizzly bear reserve. For this study, though, he purposely chose the remote Kamchatka peninsula, which boasts the densest population of brown bears in the world. He wanted to work with bears that had not been conditioned to fear people.

With its lush sedges, abundant pine nuts and salmon-rich streams, the area is home to about 700 bears. There are no roads, so few have ever seen a human. Through a non-aggressive approach, Russell and Enns began to develop a trusting relationship with many of the 40 bears that roamed within walking distance of the cabin they built on Kambalnoe Lake. They would drop to all fours if they felt a bear was unsure and often mimic the animal's vast range of vocal sounds. Their movements were slow, mirroring the bear's natural behaviour.

Their first summer was spent working with three bear cubs orphaned when their mother was killed. They fed them oatmeal porridge, then taught them to fish and find salamander eggs, but their three small charges were never hand-fed. "It would be dangerous to develop that relationship, which is why there's so many problems in campgrounds," says Russell. "The bears are confused. They get food from some people and not from others. You don't form a relationship with bears in a campground situation."

But that's not to say Russell did not get personal with some of his favourite subjects. When he speaks of the cub Chico, he can't help but smile at her friendly antics. "She had a special greeting. She would hook her claws in my fingers. It was marvellous to be this intimate."

If people accuse him of anthropomorphism, so be it, he says. He has learned to read the bears' language, a dialect expressed through subtle movements and magnificent sounds. The bears' emotions have been captured in the mixed media artwork by Enns, who hopes to educate people about positive bear/human relations through her exhibitions.

"There's absolutely no question that bears have a spectrum of feelings," says the former Alberta College of Art instructor whose vibrant work opened the new Art Gallery of Calgary in 2000. The exhibition then travelled to France and Moscow, where Enns became the first Canadian artist to exhibit in the Moscow Contemporary Art Centre.

So, will these field observations of friendly bear behaviour change how the Rocky Mountain national parks deal with the mobs of tourists who pester the animals for the perfect photograph? Not likely, says wildlife biologist Kevin Van Tighem, who has worked in Waterton Lakes National Park and is now manager of the ecosystems secretariat in Jasper National Park. "We have so many different kinds of people out there interacting with bears in different ways and it contaminates the situation."

But he does commend Russell and Enns for their work in presenting a much-needed positive image of grizzly bears. "Charlie and Maureen have shown us the ideal and what could be possible if we were as good as we like to think we are. They've given us something to measure our

performance against and a goal to work towards. In the parks, we've done so much communication around bears based on negative messages. People hear about people who get chewed up and attacked by bears, so I think it's important it be balanced with this positive message."

Russell knows the majority of people do not understand bear behaviour, so he warns them not to copy his friendly approach. But he still has critics who fear photographs of the couple being cozy with the bears send a dangerous message to the public. Hal Morrison, who

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specializes in wildlife/human conflicts in Lake Louise, Yoho and Kootenay national parks, worries that people will wrongly interpret the photographs and jeopardize their safety, which could result in bears having to be shot. It definitely makes for a lively debate among park officials, says Van Tighem, who believes "people are considerably more intelligent than resource managers sometimes give them credit for."

However, bear management policies are gradually changing, he says. Because of Russell's successful use of electric fencing in Russia, it is now used in summer to keep bears away from a hiking area on Lake Louise's ski slopes. It has also been used around railway grain spills, keeping the bears away from the highly tempting rotting grain. Conservation officers in southern Alberta now use rubber bullets or Karelian bear dogs to chase the bears from popular campgrounds and hiking areas. And in spring, they haul roadkill animals to ranches so the bears will feed off the carcasses instead of killing calves.

Such measures still use the concept of fear, but a live bear is better than a dead one, says Russell, who's lived most of his life with bears. Raised near Waterton Lakes National Park, he and his father, Andy, the renowned naturalist and author, were among the first people to film grizzly bears in the wild. In the sixties, they made *Grizzly Country*, a documentary which began to change perceptions about bear behaviour. Venturing into the backcountry without guns, they walked among the bears, even filming a nursing mother bear.

Russell and Enns are now speaking out on behalf of the bears they love and trust, educating people through their website at [www.cloudline.org](http://www.cloudline.org) and their book entitled *Grizzly Heart: Living Without Fear Among the Brown Bears of Kamchatka*, augmented by a companion book of photographs.

It will be many years before people accept living peacefully with bears, but Russell has hope for their future. "There will be the next generation of people, and there will be another generation of bears." —**Wendy Dudley**

## Great Scott!

### Albertan skier a champion in more ways than one.

She's inches off the ground, arms thrown high, skis and poles in hand. And the smile—well, if Canada's women's cross-country ski team could patent and sell it, they'd travel in five-star style. Pride of Vermilion, Alberta, Beckie Scott is jumping for joy on the bronze-medal podium in Salt Lake City. The photo on Cross Country Canada's website is titled "The True Olympic Pursuit Women's Champion."

That's because, next to Beckie and out of the picture, on the richer, gold and silver levels of the podium, stand Russian athletes Larissa Lazutina and Olga Danilova, both of whom, mere days later, would be disqualified in another race for doping (Lazutina, in fact, was stripped of that event's gold medal). Cross-country skiing is a fine-tuned sport. Tenths and hundredths of a second can mean the difference between placing first or back in the pack, and an athlete's results may depend on a similarly fine edge gained by, say, an artificially increased production of oxygen-rich cells in the blood. Enter darbepoetin, the drug found in samples from the two out-of-the-picture Russian skiers.

The 2002 Olympic winter games may be just a memory, but the struggle to level the field remains hot. More than two months after the Olympics' closing ceremonies, Lazutina's test results from an earlier World Cup, held in December 2001, showed positive. If the lag time between test and result had not been so long, Lazutina would never have shown up at all in Salt Lake City, because the rules of the Fédération Internationale de Ski disqualify the subject of a positive test from all subsequent FIS competitions. It's a sort of better-late-than-never happy ending for Scott, who may surpass her already significant achievement of being the first North American woman cross-country skier to climb an Olympic podium. She'll likely claim silver in the pursuit event—and a battle victory in the war on drugs in cross-country.

Like any elite athlete—and cross-country skiers are, many say, in the top condition of all—Scott has worked long and hard to gain her position in a small constellation of stars. That some of her fellow supergalactic bodies had been buffed up unnaturally bright really came home to her and others at an infamous world championship in



BECKIE SCOTT

COURTESY CROSS COUNTRY CANADA CRAIG DOUCE

Lahti, Finland, where the Finnish team virtually imploded in a black hole of scandal. Scott, along with fellow Albertan teammate Sara Renner and Scott's boyfriend, Justin Wadsworth, a member of the U.S. men's cross-country ski team, decided to do something about what they saw as the "sadly inadequate" testing by the FIS. Their fight took the form of a petition, received enthusiastically by elite athletes from many nations. Scott herself wrote up the petition, which called for an independent body to take over a task the concerned athletes saw as continually putting the FIS in a conflict of interest. And Scott pushed it through, doing much of the grunt work in getting the petition circulated, signed and sent to the appropriate officials. She kept

up the pressure to institute the World Anti-Doping Agency as the permanent testing body for all FIS races.

The Canadian women's team is made up of Renner, the sisters Amanda and Jaime Fortier, and Scott—all from Alberta—along with New Brunswicker Milaine Theriault. Why do so many Albertans ski for this outstanding team? Scott is philosophical. "I think it goes in cycles as to who's dominant on the international scene. We just came along at the same time and reinforced each other."

Endless "weight-shift" down those ski tracks, the focus on her skiing and the Lycra-clad competitor in front of her, hasn't narrowed the 27-year-old, though. She's taking a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English, by correspondence from the University of Waterloo. She loves the "creative" aspects of others' writing. "I really enjoy writing, myself, and I appreciate having the work of other authors analyzed to see what the real, true meaning is of what's being said. I've always loved it. I've always done well at it." Last book read? Well, the second last was Margaret Atwood's Booker Prize-winning *The Blind Assassin*. And the last? With a laugh, she admits the very most recent weighty tome was *How to Be a Canadian: Even if You Already Are One*, by Will Ferguson and Ian Ferguson. "That was a real kick," she laughs. "I really needed something light after all that pressure."

Scott's determination, self-assurance and self-discipline are mixed with lively good humour, genuineness and a healthy perspective on the sport and her place in it. Interviewed by CBC immediately after her bronze-medal win in the pursuit, an ecstatic and somewhat surprised Scott focused not on her own achievement but on how

she hoped it would do great things for the sport in Canada, “because it sure needs it.” Asked what she brings from a small town in Alberta to the world, Scott says it may be an appreciation for what the world has to offer. “I’m really grateful for all the opportunities that I’ve had.” One of those opportunities, encouraged by her ski racing parents, was the Jackrabbit Ski League program for kids. The Canada-wide program was initiated by “Jackrabbit” Johannsen, a Norwegian who tirelessly promoted skiing and outdoor values after moving to this country. Beckie began skiing at the age of five and was a Jackrabbit at the Vermilion Nordic ski club for several years before moving on to race in the Alberta Cup.

Peter Gzowski said once that some of the strongest people he’d ever faced were Canada’s prairie women. I’m thinking some of that straight-talking, crap-demolishing perseverance, even missionary zeal, is taking it to the world in the person of Alberta’s Beckie Scott. —*Judy Millar*



## Hooked on Hong Kong East is east and west is east too, when it comes to work ethic

In a city that boasts the world’s highest annual average of hours worked (out of 48 major cities), former Alberta resident Allan Matheson credits an Alberta work ethic, learned young, for some of his success.

“The pace of life in Hong Kong appealed to me.” Allan Matheson, executive director of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong (CanCham), tries to explain his addiction to life on this tiny island in the South China Sea as we settle into his office on Hollywood Road. By Hong Kong standards, it’s early in the morning, almost 9 a.m. (For most, the workday won’t end until

late tonight). But Matheson has already been here awhile, catching up on some work that has piled up on his desk after a day off. He seems almost apologetic for the break. “Hong Kong is the most intense environment you could imagine,” he explains. “People here work exceedingly

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hard. Work is not just what you do, it is what you *are* in Hong Kong. They are always going, going. They do the same with their personal lives. They don’t relax by watching a movie; they are always doing something. That’s what I loved about it. I loved it from the minute I got here.”

Born in Toronto, Matheson moved to Alberta in 1980 and spent a number of what he refers to as his “formative years” growing up on an acreage near Conrich. After learning Mandarin and obtaining a BA in international relations at the University of British Columbia, he headed to Beijing for a year to fine-tune his language skills. In 2000, he became membership manager at CanCham. He has been its high-profile executive director for over a year.

Matheson admits, “I still do consider myself to be an Albertan and there are certainly aspects of me being Albertan that I am applying internationally.” He points to the work ethic he learned here, which he believes most Albertans have, as a big factor in his success. “Albertans work very hard. Reflecting on my time in Conrich, I remember the amount of work necessitated early rises and a full day’s work. Much the same as the business community in Hong Kong.”

Matheson says his exposure to the value system and way of life in a rural Alberta community “was invaluable. [It] gives me insight and an understanding of many facets of living and working in Asia that some people do not have.” He explains the connection. “Hong Kong obviously is not an agricultural society, but with China becoming an ever larger part of business and political life [here], the insight into agricultural communities is invaluable. Not to say Alberta and China are similar, but there are remarkable similarities between the system of values and priorities that need to be part of any political reform and economic development.”

As China opens its borders to the world, Hong Kong faces huge new challenges to its status as China’s gateway. But the former Albertan has no plans to leave any time soon. “I want to stay and help make Hong Kong as good as it can be.” Matheson, it seems, is hooked for awhile.

—*Lorraine Andrews*

## This is what Democracy looks like. Albertan filmmaker creates her own media.

Anyone familiar with Jacquie Soohen and her impressive body of work wouldn't have been surprised to learn that she was holed up with over 200 Palestinians, nine activists and other sundry militia in the 39-day siege at Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem last spring. Soohen is a 27-year-old documentary filmmaker and independent media advocate from Alberta who now calls New York home.

But how did the girl from Stony Plain end up in the middle of the siege the whole world was watching? Soohen was filming in Manger Square and followed nine members of the International Solidarity Movement as they slipped past Israeli troops to bring food inside the church. And when it was over, her picture was plastered on the front of the *Calgary Sun*, the CBC was abuzz and her story appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald* and *The Globe and Mail*.

Soohen is no stranger to media, but she prefers to create her own. Frustrated by convergence and the increasing corporatization of the fourth estate, Jacquie was an early member of the Independent Media Centre, formed by media activists to provide grassroots coverage of the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. The IMC is a network of collectively run media for "the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth."

In Seattle, members were encouraged to film protests and place their footage on the Net, filling the gigantic holes in coverage left by mainstream media. The IMC's work had a major impact and was responsible for disproving claims of excessive police politesse. Early reports by the network media accepted the repeated police statements that tear gas wasn't being used. However, the IMC Web site proved otherwise by distributing video of police using tear gas and rubber bullets. According to Soohen, "the Web site received over one million hits during the protest week, and it was rated above the BBC or CNN by officials at Yahoo.com." The success of the first IMC in Seattle spawned openings of IMCs in Canada, Congo, Colombia, India, Australia, Belgium, Italy, Mexico, France and England. There's one on every continent and they promise more to come.

When Soohen isn't at the centre of international standoffs, she keeps herself busy making films about other standoffs, both international and domestic. Soohen left Alberta in Grade 11 after she won a \$15,000 scholarship to complete a two-year baccalaureate program in Italy. Subsequent scholarships enabled her to take a



COURTESY JACQUIE SOOHEN

degree at Harvard. Now she's a founder, producer and director at the appropriately named Big Noise Films—a non-profit media collective. Their credo: "the corporate media works to disempower us. It churns out endless reproductions of monotonous consumerist trash; but more importantly, it distorts, marginalizes and co-opts subversive cultural voices."

The projects of Big Noise Films are anything but monotonous in their range and scope. *Black and Gold* traces the transition of a group of New York gangbangers into activists trying to rebuild their communities in the face of constant police harassment and brutality. *Zapatista* combines first-hand footage with extensive interviews and testimonies from campesinos, rebel leaders, activists and intellectuals from both sides. In the summer of 1996, Soohen and two other students were so compelled by the words of the Zapatistas that they went to Chiapas, armed only with credit cards and a couple of state-of-the-art digital video cameras. They made their way deep inside rebel territory and got the rare late-night interview that big media never did, with Subcomandante Marcos, the elusive spokesperson for the movement.

But Big Noise Films' most lauded project to date is *This is What Democracy Looks Like*. It was directed by Soohen's Harvard film studies graduate husband, Rick Rowley, and Soohen provided videography. The film was a coproduction of the Seattle IMC and Big Noise Films—a 70-minute documentary capturing Seattle's WTO protests with narration by Susan Sarandon and music by Rage Against the Machine. The film has received acclaim from the high priestess of anticorporate media herself, Naomi Klein: "*This Is What Democracy Looks Like* is a truly ground-breaking accomplishment. With beautiful graphics, a passionate narrative and stunning writing, it embodies the spirit of the protests."

Soohen is interested in movements that the mainstream media ignore or stigmatize, "movements whose media image is calculated to inspire fear." And it seems a lot of other people are interested too. For a woman under 30, she has already cut a pretty wide swath through her field, a field that requires her to go places others won't—which is exactly how she ended up in Bethlehem. Soohen's grandmother thought her granddaughter was a little too close to the danger this time, in Bethlehem. But grandma confirms Soohen's quality of independence: "She does what she wants; that's why she's making those films." For the sake of those who don't believe everything they see, let's hope Soohen keeps going to those places and making those films.

—Renée Groves with files from Kaitly Mendes